

Chairman Tom Davis
Government Reform Committee Hearing,
“Climate Change: Understanding the Degree of the Problem”
Opening Statement
July 20, 2006

Good morning, and welcome to today's hearing on climate change. I want to thank my friend and colleague and the Ranking Member of this Committee, Henry Waxman, for working with me to make the discussion of climate change a priority for this Committee. We've committed to addressing this issue in a nonpartisan way, and that's how it should be. For too long, the political dialogue on climate change has been dominated by black-and-white grandstanding – either finger-wagging or head-in-the-sand denial and denunciation. There has been no reasonable discourse.

That has to change. Over the past several years – and especially over the past six months, in the wake of Hurricane Katrina and the release of Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth* – climate change has understandably jumped to the forefront of American discourse. We've seen the *Time* cover story suggesting we: “Be Worried. Be VERY worried.” And yesterday's London *Independent* newspaper reporting: “Temperature set to hit 100 degrees – and global warming is to blame.” And the deluge of attention to *An Inconvenient Truth* and its depictions of the potential disasters of global warming.

We're here today to acknowledge that too many elected officials have for too long been M-I-A on this issue. We hope to begin changing that. But first we need to step back and ask some basic but critical questions.

Exactly what is climate change, and where are we with the science?

There aren't many people left these days who would argue global warming isn't happening, *per se*. There is widespread agreement that the global mean temperature has gone up approximately one degree Fahrenheit over the past century, that atmospheric carbon dioxide has also increased over the past century, and that carbon dioxide as a minor greenhouse substance (as opposed to major substances such as water vapor and clouds) likely contributes to warming.

But beyond this, consensus – scientific, political, technological, and moral – remains elusive.

That's where we must step in. It is our job to ask whether we're responding appropriately where there is scientific consensus, and whether we're facilitating the research and ensuring an unbiased review where there is not.

Knowledge is refined through continuous inquiry, and yes, through skepticism. As Mr. Waxman said at an Energy and Commerce Committee hearing yesterday, “[s]cience is hearing both sides, looking at the evidence, reaching conclusions based on

the evidence.” Living and breathing through the power of evidence, science evolves. Policy needs to evolve along with it.

To that end, we are fortunate to be hearing from leading researchers on climate change about climate change science and about some of their new research. But this hearing has not been spared the disappointment and politicization that has accompanied this issue for so long.

We were looking forward to hearing from Dr. Jim Hansen, NASA’s preeminent climate change scientist. But we learned just days ago that he was no longer available to testify. Let the record show he was not muzzled, not by this Committee at least.

Nor will we be hearing from Vice President Gore, who has spoken often of Congress’s and the Administration’s “blinding lack of awareness” about this “planetary emergency” and whose spokesperson told the L.A. Times the Vice President would “go anywhere and talk to any audience that wants to learn about climate change and how to solve it.” The Committee asked the Vice President to pick any date in June or July, but apparently ours was not one of the “audiences” he had in mind. While Mr. Waxman and I are disappointed, we understand that movie screenings and book signings are time consuming, and we hope his book signing in Northern Virginia went well yesterday.

Regardless, the panels of witnesses we have with us this morning will help us greatly in learning more about the “truth” – inconvenient or otherwise – surrounding climate change. We will hear from the Administration about the President’s Climate Change initiatives and the Federal Government’s extensive research. We’ll hear from respected scientists with differing views on the science of climate change. And, we’ll hear from companies and organizations that are responding to climate change challenges in their own, important ways.

Today is about education. It’s about whether we have the courage to ask the difficult questions without regard for what the answers may be. It’s about beginning to get those answers so that strategies to combat climate change can become clearer. So that we can begin to understand the complex combination of technologies, incentives, restrictions and sacrifices that may be needed to truly tackle this problem, whatever its degree.

Policymakers need to understand this issue before we can pretend to effectively address potential solutions and debate the personal, economic, and societal impacts they will inevitable involve. Opportunity has knocked, and today this Committee at least is answering the door.